



Michigan Counseling Association
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To: House of Representative Insurance Committee

From: The Michigan Counseling Association

Re: SB 975; "Religious Liberty and Conscience Protection"

Date: December 12, 2012

The Michigan Counseling Association (MCA) is the organization that represents professional counselors who work with clients in public and private agencies, schools and colleges/universities and private practice throughout the state of Michigan. MCA strongly opposes SB 975 because this law would significantly hinder the access to those seeking counseling services as well as university programs that train professional counselors, and students who aspire to become counselors.

If enacted, this bill will allow mental health professionals and students in counseling, psychology, and social work training programs to refuse to see clients – based on the client's race, sex, or national origin, among other protected traits – as long as they claim deeply held religious or moral convictions. In allowing such discrimination, practicing professionals and professional training programs would be violating a cornerstone of the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics. The ACA Code of Ethics, Section C.5, states "Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/ spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status/partnership, language preference, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law." (ACA, 2005).

Cultural competency is a foundation of the ACA Code of Ethics and of the curricular requirements for professional counselor education. In order to work effectively with clients, counseling students and professional counselors must learn to work with a diverse population of clients. The expectation that students behave in accordance with the ACA Code of Ethics is a curricular requirement for any program that seeks accreditation by CACREP (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Educational Programs), the national accrediting body for counseling programs.

In adopting the CACREP standards as the model for program approval, the Michigan Counselor Licensure Law (Michigan Public Health Code, Part 181, Counseling) also adopts the ACA Code of Ethics. If this bill it will be requiring both the Michigan Counselor Licensure Law and graduate counseling programs to violate the ACA Code of Ethics.